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ABSTRACT

This symposium chaired by John C. Belland addressed the ethical position of educational communications and technology in society. Presenters created ethics scenarios and applied critical theory to provide insight. Intended to stimulate questions, the approach was philosophical, literary, and sociopolitical, and reflected Derrida, Foucault, and Habermas among others. This paper provides abstracts of the following presentations: (1) "Introduction to Thinking Otherwise: Critical Theory, Ethics, and Postmodernism" (Andrew R. J. Yeaman); (2) "Deconstruction and Educational Media" (Andrew R. J. Yeaman); (3) "Restructuring, Technology, and Schools" (Robert Muffoletto); (4) "The Rite of Right or the Right of Rite: Moving towards an Ethics of Technological Empowerment" (Jane Anderson); (5) "Feminisms, Foucault, and Felicitous Design" (Suzanne K. Damarin); (6) "Communicative Action and Educational Biotechnology" (Randall G. Nichols); (7) "Marginalizing Significant Others: The Canadian Contribution to Educational Technology" (Denis Hlynka); and (8) "Commentary on Postmodern Implications for the Future of Theory, Research, and Development" (J. Randall Koetting). A reference list of 90 items is also provided. (Author/BBM)

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Title:

Ethics Scenarios: A Critical Theory Symposium

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Ethics Scenarios: A Critical Theory Symposium

Abstract

This session addresses the ethical position of educational communications and technology in society. Presenters create ethics scenarios and apply critical theory to provide insight. The approach is philosophical, literary and sociopolitical and reflects Derrida, Foucault and Habermas among others. This symposium is intended to stimulate questions.

Chair

Dr. John C. Belland, Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio

Papers and Presenters

Introduction to Thinking Otherwise: Critical Theory, Ethics and Postmodernism

Dr. Andrew R. J. Yeaman, Yeaman & Associates, Denver, Colorado

Deconstruction and Educational Media

Dr. Andrew R. J. Yeaman, Yeaman & Associates, Denver, Colorado

Restructuring, Technology and Schools

Dr. Robert Muffoletto, University of Northern Iowa, Cedar Falls, Iowa

The Rite of Right or The Right of Rite: Moving Towards an Ethics of Technological Empowerment

Dr. Jane Anderson, Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio

Feminisms, Foucault and Felicitous Design

Dr. Suzanne K. Damarin, Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio

Communicative Action and Educational Biotechnology

Dr. Randall G. Nichols, University of Cincinnati, Cincinnati, Ohio

Marginalizing Significant Others: The Canadian Contribution to Educational Technology

Dr. Denis Hlynka, University of Manitoba, Winnipeg, Canada

Discussant

Commentary on Postmodern Implications for the Future of Theory, Research and Development

Dr. J. Randall Koetting, University of Nevada-Reno, Reno, Nevada

Ethics Scenarios: A Critical Theory Symposium

Papers

Introduction to Thinking Otherwise: Critical Theory, Ethics and Postmodernism

Dr. Andrew R. J. Yeaman, Yeaman & Associates, Denver, Colorado

The imperative for many cultural agents in the era of concentration camps and nuclear weapons has been to think "otherwise," to transgress the coherent unity of a metaphysics that has proven inadequate to the problems we face.

(Ulmer, 1986, p. 27)

The purpose of this symposium is to examine the ethics of educational communications and technology. The essayists writing here reflect on ethics through contemporary critical theorists such as Derrida, Foucault and Habermas among others. The critical theory approach is philosophical, literary and sociopolitical. The emphasis is not on the ethical behavior of individuals, which seems to be the domain of the AECT Code of Ethics, but on the ethical position of educational communications and technology in society.

A secondary purpose is to encourage more scholars to engage in cultural analysis. The authors address ethical aspects of the field and provide insight by demonstrating the application of critical theory. This symposium is intended to stimulate questions about critical theory and will encourage discussion about the global effects of the field.

What is critical theory?

Critical theory dates back at least to Socrates privileging the reality of ideas or forms over the reality of appearances (Adams, 1971). Over the millennia this debate on interpretation, representation and media became the intellectual foundation of philosophy, theology, literary criticism, linguistics, psychology, communications and education. In the 1960s the literary focus of critical theory in North America was augmented through importing the European emphasis on sociological analysis and the critique of ideology (Adams & Searle, 1986).

There is no unified critical theory but critical thought¹ is nevertheless influential. Despite their disagreements, critical theorists tend to concur that

¹ Critical theory should not be conflated with critical thinking, the recent pedagogical movement advocating teacher centered questioning for the development of thinking skills.

reality is socially constructed, that the positivistic labeling of people is not natural and that scientific explanations of human behavior lack objectivity (Gibson, 1986). Contemporary texts produced by critical theorizing are viewed not as derivative, secondhand literature but as original, primary works actively confronting real problems (Eagleton, 1983; Hartman, 1981). Current scholarship in education takes this point of view, especially *Critical theory and education* (Gibson, 1986), *Postmodern education: Politics, culture, and social criticism* (Aronowitz & Giroux, 1991), *Postmodernism, feminism, and cultural politics* (Giroux, 1991) and *Power and criticism: Poststructural investigations in education* (Cherryholmes, 1988). Direct application to educational communications and technology is made by *Paradigms regained: The uses of illuminative, semiotic and post-modern criticism as modes of inquiry in educational technology* (Hlynka & Belland, 1991) and *The ideology of images in educational media* (Ellsworth & Whatley, 1990).

This introduction also suggests these questions:

- How is criticism related to education?
- What are poststructuralism and postmodernism?
- How is critical theory related to ethics?
- What are postmodern ethics?
- How are postmodern ethics related to educational technology?

The critical theorists referenced in this symposium diverge from each other but issues of unity or fragmentation are exactly not the point. The questions applied here to the field of educational communications and technology are important to raise. The group writing in these pages seeks to develop understandings of ethical conscience as the prerequisite to any action. Whether or not the discourse of any emancipatory metanarrative is true, for critical theorists the ethical approach is necessary.

Deconstruction and Educational Media

Dr. Andrew R. J. Yeaman, Yeaman & Associates, Denver, Colorado

Derrida is part of that general movement in the humanities of our century, responding in protest to the ideological constraints of a civilization that seems bent on self-destruction.

(Ulmer, 1986, p. 27)

Deconstruction can reveal distortions and biases in education (Cherryholmes, 1988) and educational technology (Hlynka & Belland, 1991). For example, this presentation demonstrates how a safety message deconstructs into the concerns of manufacturers and dealers about product liability. It shows that doublespeak obscures the power relations of the social context (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990):

How do things slip around so that the accidents caused by badly designed media equipment are no longer the responsibility of manufacturers, suppliers and purchasing officers but become the fault of instructors?

Reading deconstructively as a way of identifying blind spots is originally described by de Man (1983) and Derrida (1973, 1976, 1985, 1987a, 1990) and has profoundly affected literary interpretation and analytic philosophy (Rorty, 1989). Norris explains, "To 'deconstruct' a text is to draw out conflicting logics of sense and implication, with the object of showing that the text never exactly means what it says or says what it means." (1988, p. 7).

Deconstruction translates to painting (Derrida, 1987b), architecture (Norris & Benjamin, 1988; Papadakis, Cooke & Benjamin, 1990), video (Ulmer, 1989) and cinema (Brunette & Wills, 1989). Deconstruction is also useful when considering the ethics of designing, selecting and evaluating educational media.

Restructuring, Technology and Schools

Dr. Robert Muffoletto, University of Northern Iowa, Cedar Falls, Iowa

This paper inquires into the culture of schools restructuring and the role of technology (Bowers, 1988). California and Iowa function as platforms for observation and analysis. The critique will unpack the rationalizations, justifications and envisioned results from the literature of each locale.

Constructing and reconstructing schools are social political processes. American schools serve purposes reflected in the symbolic interactions, regulations, and controls over what teachers, administrators, students do and think, plus the form and content of knowledge disseminated and reproduced daily in classrooms (Apple, 1982; Apple, 1988; Apple & Weis, 1983, Gerbner, 1974, Kliebard, 1986). The conceptualization and use of various technologies became over the last 50 years a major part of schooling (Cuban, 1986; Saettler, 1990). Restructuring, and the role technology plays, can be better understood when contextualized within the historical struggles for control of American education. Within this context the unpacking of the symbolic may reveal a different agenda.

These postmodern questions (Cherryholmes, 1988) will guide the inquiry:

- What are the historical assumptions about education, technology, and the larger state agenda that guide the restructuring process?
- What will change because of the new order?
- Who makes the decisions and sets the agenda for change?
- Who may benefit from the change if it is carried out as prescribed?

The Rite of Right or The Right of Rite: Moving Towards an Ethics of Technological Empowerment

Ms. Jane Anderson, Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio

From Freire's work in emancipatory pedagogy emerge assumptions of self-determination, collective identification, and reorientation to positions of power (1970, 1978, 1985). What do these assumptions suggest to the ethics of the liberatory researcher (Shor, 1987) involved in the promotion of educational technology? In framing a liberatory approach to educational technology, I focus on the human right and the cultural rite. Foucauldian notions on the concept of power-knowledge and the role of the "specific intellectual" will be addressed due to their affinity to these concepts.

My discussion considers:

- What might be an ethics of technological and communicative empowerment after considering Freire's emancipatory pedagogy and Foucault's notions of injustice and oppression?
- How can our field foster the creation of spaces where a multiplicity of views can co-exist and support each other?
- What approach should be taken to promote technological skills among people seeking a greater voice?

Feminisms, Foucault and Felicitous Design

Dr. Suzanne K. Damarin, Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio

Some feminist philosophers (e.g., Noddings, 1984; 1989) and social scientists (Gilligan, 1982; Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger & Tarule, 1986) suggest that an ethic of care should guide instructional activity and, by inference, the design of instruction. The ethic of caring is detailed by these writers in sharp contrast with the ethics of justice which undergird most discussions of ethics in relation both to technology (e.g., Ermann, Williams & Gutierrez, 1990) and to educational issues such as equity. Discussing an ethic of caring thereby introduces new (feminist) ideas into this field.

Further, the postmodern feminist critique rejects the ethic of caring as essentializing. Foucauldian analyses reveal that "caring" (like justice) promotes hierarchal observation, normalizing judgments, etc. (Foucault, 1979). These observations problematize the implications of an ethic of care and raise issues, questions and suggestions about the design of instruction.

Communicative Action and Educational Biotechnology

Dr. Randall G. Nichols, University of Cincinnati, Cincinnati, Ohio

Habermas' studies conclude that growing uses of media, and the rational-instrumental thinking that accompanies media, tends to remove humans from meaningful communication and community (1984, 1987). This growth and removal inherently involves questions of ethics. Nichols extends this argument to the educational uses of both media and extremely rational thinking (1989, 1991). Building on that foundation, this paper looks to a likely near future of educational technology (Knirk & Gustafson, 1986; Perelman, 1990) and applies Habermas' theory of communicative action. Specifically, educational biotechnology (EBT) will appear in the daily lives of all educators and learners (Heinich, Molenda & Russell, 1989, p. 403) because of the proliferation of genetic mapping and manipulation, the altering of human chemistry and public and private pressures to improve American/Western educational outcomes (Noble, 1989). The paper will suggest the use of Habermas' moral principles as guidelines for managing the ethical and educational dimensions of this near future.

Marginalizing Significant Others: The Canadian Contribution to Educational Technology

Dr. Denis Hlynka, University of Manitoba, Winnipeg, Canada

Postmodernists have developed a variety of concepts and strategies for examining contemporary society. For example, the Derridian concept of *supplementation* of the dominant discourse with minority discourses has met with significant change in practice. Black studies, feminist praxis, and ethnic discourses are only three such developments. Eco's exploration of literary texts as open and closed is reflected in slippery signifiers. *Marginalization* and *deconstruction* have resulted in an interchange of dominant and colonized. Baudrillard's precession of the simulacrum has resulted in a re-thinking of origins. Finally, Lyotard's postmodern condition has allowed us new ways of looking at the information revolution.

For several of these writers and philosophers technology is an integral component of their thinking and there are serious technological implications to be derived from a postmodern perspective. But educational technology is only beginning to examine such a perspective.

Canadian educational technology offers a clear case of postmodernism in action. Because of the peculiarities of size and population (Canada is second in geographic size next to Russia, yet with a population smaller than the state of California) and because of the Canadian proximity to an economic giant

(the United States of America), Canada has long exhibited schizophrenic behavior. In many ways, to be Canadian is to be postmodern.

First, Canada as a whole is marginalized. It exists under the shadow of its neighbor. Its culture is uniquely Canadian, yet you can hardly find that culture by watching Canadian television or looking in the shelves of Canadian bookstores. Canada is a minority discourse, struggling for its own place in the world. In educational technology, Canada has unknowingly provided consistent but marginal contributions which have first deferred to the overwhelmingly American contribution, then differed from those contributions, and then finally supplemented the American discourse on educational technology. What is the Canadian discourse on educational technology? In brief it consists of the following:

- Marshall McLuhan, a postmodernist before his time, predated Derrida with his *Laws of Media* and provided the foundation for Baudrillard's exploration of the simulacrum with his famous one-liner: The medium is the message.
- The National Film Board of Canada, a unique production unit which, under the guidance of John Grierson gave meaning to the term documentary and provided a model which was adopted and then adapted by nearly all major educational film and television production organizations.
- Arthur Kroker, Canadian postmodern political scientist has examined technology and the Canadian mind by showing a continuum between despondency and freedom, and an intermixing of contributions of art and technology. The well known technologists who form the crux of Kroker's exposition are George Grant, Harold Innis and Marshall McLuhan.
- Ursula Franklin, Canadian physicist, has recently contributed to the debate by showing how the real world of technology is mediated by social, political and cultural factors which must be kept up front if one is to avoid being crushed by the inexorable rush of technology out of control.

The twenty first century is about to begin on an ambiguous and decentered note. Educational technologists know that the answer to an improved education is not merely more technology, nor faster technology, nor even more accurate technology. Educational technologists however are not Luddites who want less technology, slower technology or even no technology. Canada has made major, albeit often unrecognized and even unnoticed contributions to the dialogue exploring these relationships between technology and education. The purpose of this paper is to put that record in its proper perspective.

Discussion

**Commentary on Postmodern Implications for the Future of
Theory, Research and Development**

Dr. J. Randall Koetting, University of Nevada-Reno, Reno, Nevada

The commentary provides an overview of the contributions and compare their positions on the ethics of the field. Observations are made about the future direction of theory and research. The commentary includes the application of theory and research to postmodern development in the field.

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